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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 001159

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, EB/TPP, G/TIP, AND DRL/IL
STATE PLEASE PASS TO USTR FOR SDONNELLY, LKARESH, DBELL, AND
AROSENBERG

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: 07/12/2017

TAGS: ELAB PHUM PREL ETRD AE

SUBJECT: UAEG TO STUDY U.S., GERMAN TEMPORARY WORKER PROGRAMS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 4, Econoff met with Alex Zalamy, Advisor to the UAE Minister of Labor, to discuss guest workers and the changes being made to the current labor law to help protect foreign workers. Zalamy explained that foreign workers are "temporary" workers, not "immigrant" workers and stressed to Econoff that the USG must understand the UAEG's oft-stated position that labor is an issue of "national security." Zalamy also told Econoff that he is planning a trip to Washington and Berlin in November to meet with labor officials and study the guest worker programs in those countries.
End Summary.

Workers -- Temporary, Not Permanent Immigrants

¶2. (C) Zalamy explained that expatriate workers in the UAE are temporary workers, not immigrant workers, since foreigners are not permitted to immigrate, regardless of how many years they have been working in the country. Once a foreign worker retires, he is not allowed to remain in the UAE and must return to his home country. Econoff stressed to Zalamy that workers are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to form unions and collective bargaining. Zalamy said that the proposed new labor law is currently on hold and the Ministry of Labor (MOL) is seeking ways to reach a compromise with all sides on the issues of labor unions and collective bargaining. According to Zalamy, the MOL will invite certain stakeholders to an "invitation only" meeting to discuss these issues and hopefully reach a compromise. Zalamy also said, "Many private Emiratis as well as certain UAEG Ministries do not want to allow unions or collective bargaining, even though the MOL believes some form of unionization is necessary." He stated that the UAE may decide to follow the German approach on guest-workers, which would offer temporary workers certain rights although not full trade union membership.

Ministry of Labor Visit to Washington and Berlin

¶3. (C) Zalamy told Econoff that he is planning to visit Washington, along with a team of five colleagues, during the first week of November 2007. The purpose of the visit is to familiarize the MOL team with the legal, regulatory and administrative framework that governs the admission and temporary residence of guest workers in the U.S. and in Germany. The UAE team wants to learn more about the rights of foreign workers in the U.S., and the UAE wants to perfect technical means for ensuring that its foreign workers are not allowed to remain in the UAE after their contracts have ended. The MOL team will meet with a variety of USG agencies, NGOs, and labor unions during their trip; the team has already begun coordinating its trip with USTR and the Department of Labor.

¶4. (C) After the trip to Washington, D.C., the MOL team will visit

Berlin for a similar week-long program with the German Ministry of Labor. The UAE MOL hopes to be able to devise a comprehensive labor law that will provide some rights and protections for guest workers in the UAE by December 2007, when the UAE will host the International Organization for Migration meeting in Dubai. Until then, Zalamy believes the labor law will remain "in limbo" and does not expect a new labor law will be released before December 2007.

15. (C) Comment: The issue of foreign workers is a contentious one in the UAE. The UAE's local population of less than one million (out of four million-plus residents) is too small to support the rapid development seen over the last several years, but Emiratis are increasingly concerned about the significant demographic imbalance in the country. In fact, UAE Vice President/Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum sharply criticized the Ministry of Labor in April for failing to rectify "the population imbalance" when he unveiled the UAEG's new government strategy. End Comment.

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